

The Elders: Zimbabwe is failing its people

- **The scale of the crisis must be acknowledged and addressed by Zimbabwe's leaders**
- **Elders call on SADC countries to act immediately on cholera, refugees**

Johannesburg, Monday 24 November

Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former United States President Jimmy Carter and international advocate for women's and children's rights Dr Graça Machel have concluded a three day assessment of the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe.

Unable to travel to Zimbabwe as originally planned, the Elders instead met political leaders, businessmen, aid workers, donors, UN agencies and civil society representatives in Johannesburg over the weekend, many of whom travelled from Zimbabwe to see them. They also held meetings with leaders of South Africa and Botswana.

While the nature of the problems in Zimbabwe has been well known, their meetings revealed a sharp deterioration in the crisis recent weeks.

FOOD

Food is the most serious problem. There is not enough to meet immediate needs and an acute shortage of seed and fertiliser means that April's harvest will produce a fraction of what is required. Donor assistance for the planting season reached only 25 per cent of the poorest rural smallholders.

The number of people reliant on food aid from UN and other agencies has increased from 2.6 million in October to 4.9 million in November. Half the population, 5.1 million people, will need food aid by January.

World Food Programme has already cut back on rations to make stocks last longer – leaving people with a daily allowance that provides just under 1500 calories, well below the bare minimum for survival. Without immediate increases in food availability, malnutrition rates will inevitably increase sharply.

HEALTH

Four major hospitals, including two in Harare, have closed their doors to almost all patients for lack of medicine and basic supplies – including running water. Hundreds of pregnant women needing caesarean sections or other assistance to give birth safely are being turned away. Staff numbers are falling as people make the search for food a priority.

About 15 per cent of the population is infected with HIV. 3,500 die every week. The AIDS crisis has left almost one in four children without one or both parents.

EDUCATION

School attendance has fallen sharply from over 85 per cent in 2007 to just 20 per cent. Universities have not opened at all this term. A teacher's monthly salary barely covers a day's average transport costs.

WATER AND SANITATION

Zimbabwe's collapsing health and water infrastructure has led to a major cholera outbreak that now raises the risk of a trans-regional cholera epidemic.

An estimated 6,300 cholera cases have been recorded in 9 out of 10 provinces in Zimbabwe, with fatality rates far above accepted international emergency levels of 1 per cent. Cases are already being recorded in South Africa and other neighbouring countries.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND CASH CRISIS

Hyperinflation means monthly salaries have plummeted in value with severe cash shortages making it very difficult for even those with incomes to buy enough to eat. The government has recently permitted the use of US dollars in some stores, but this is leading to a two-tier economy between those who have access to foreign currency and the majority who do not. Hyperinflation is affecting the dollarized sector as well.

MASS MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Zimbabwe's failing economy and humanitarian disaster has created an estimated 3 million refugees. The SADC region has ignored this refugee exodus, refusing to name it as such, which means that many of those who leave risk arrest and deportation.

IMPASSE ON FORMING A GOVERNMENT

The failure to implement the Global Political Agreement is accelerating the humanitarian disaster. Without political progress, none of these issues can be properly addressed.

"We knew when we planned this trip that the situation in Zimbabwe was serious," said Mr Annan. "What we have learned in the past few days is shocking. It is not just the extent of Zimbabwe's humanitarian crisis, but the speed of deterioration in the past few weeks that is most worrying. The scale, depth and urgency of the situation are underreported."

President Carter said: "The signing of the 15 September agreement raised hopes in Zimbabwe and around the world, but the failure to implement it in good faith and create a workable power sharing government is leading to despair and accelerating the crisis. Regardless of the challenges in implementing the agreement, all parties should now make the welfare of the people their first priority and put an end to the unnecessary suffering of millions."

"The state is no longer able to offer basic services", said Dr Machel. "It can no longer feed, educate or care for its citizens. It is failing its people."

On leaving South Africa, the Elders will continue to follow events in Zimbabwe closely and use their influence wherever they can to ensure that the situation in the country is widely acknowledged and addressed.

Recommendations:

Political agreement

- All political parties should implement, in good faith, the Global Political Agreement as a matter of urgency, and work to form a truly inclusive government to tackle the humanitarian and economic crisis, also working with regional and international partners.

Food

- Donors should provide sufficient resources to meet emergency humanitarian needs, including the current \$140 million required to feed people until April. They should also support the consolidated appeal of \$550 million by 35 agencies to address urgent needs in all sectors in 2009.
- Humanitarian agencies must have unimpeded access, to assess needs and deliver humanitarian assistance without restraint.
- The Elders call on the United Nations, especially the WFP and FAO to work with the government and others to bring critical support to smallholder farmers in particular, especially in seed and fertiliser. This could enable a new 'Home Grown Help' initiative to be launched in time for the 2009-10 agricultural season. The government will also need to review current policies that create disincentives for agricultural production such as price controls and monopolies.

Health

- To address the cholera outbreak it is essential that the region comes together to set up a medical task force to help deal with those affected and to contain the spread of the disease.
- The government of Zimbabwe, working with the UN and international agencies, should find creative ways of retaining doctors, nurses and other essential staff, and ensure that medical supplies are available.
- Extraordinary measures to attract qualified health workers from surrounding countries should be brought in to address the fatal cholera epidemic. The Elders call on SADC to ensure proper capacity, regional coordination and cooperation.

Education

- Government, with assistance from donors and aid agencies, should create incentives for teachers to go back to school, including transport allowances, adequate salary, housing and access to food.

Water and Sanitation

- Government, with assistance from donors, should ensure the emergency treatment of existing water sources, along with efforts to rehabilitate water and sanitation infrastructure.

SADC region

- The SADC region needs to acknowledge that the crisis in Zimbabwe is affecting neighbouring countries and it is in the interests of all that it be addressed immediately.

The Elders want to thank all those who met them and helped make their stay in the region so productive, especially those who travelled from Zimbabwe to meet them, as well as the Presidents of South Africa and Botswana. SADC must play a crucial role in ensuring not only that the power-sharing agreement is implemented as soon as possible, but that work to get Zimbabwe back from the brink begins as well.

For more information please see www.theElders.org

Media contact: Katy Cronin +27 82 858 5923 katy.cronin@theElders.org